UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General, in Geneva, holds talks on East Timor with Foreign Ministers of Portugal and Indonesia; parties agree to continue efforts to seek just and comprehensive settlement.

+ Secretary-General says Security Council should extend UNOMIL mandate for three months; urges Liberian parties to implement Accra Agreement and observe cease-fire.

+ Georgian/Abkhaz political process is at standstill, Secretary-General reports; recommends three-month extension of UNOMIG mandate.

+ United Nations says it began and ended 1994 with 17 active peace-keeping operations around world.

+ Malaysian peace-keepers leave Somalia; French frigate arrives off coast to help cover final withdrawal of UNOSOM II.

+ UNHCR team arrives in North Ossetia to begin assessing Chechen refugee situation.

+ Family planning can save children's lives and benefit health of mothers, United Nations study shows.

+ World Commission on Culture and Development to meet in Muscat from 10 to 12 January.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was in Geneva today, where he held a fifth round of meetings on East Timor with the Foreign Ministers of Portugal and Indonesia, according to a United Nations spokesman. Discussions focused on the Secretary-General's initiative to facilitate the convening of an all-inclusive intra-East Timorese dialogue, on a set of issues to be addressed in future talks, and on confidence-building measures.

(more)

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The parties agreed to continue their efforts, with the assistance of the Secretary-General, to find a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable settlement to the question of East Timor. The sixth round of talks will be held in New York on 19 May.

The Secretary-General will leave Geneva tomorrow for Finland, the spokesman said. He will also visit Sweden, Denmark and Germany during his current trip.

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The Secretary-General has recommended that the Security Council extend the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) for three months to 13 April. In a report dated 6 January, he said the Liberian parties would be expected to respect the Accra Agreement of 21 December and the cease-fire which was implemented a week later. However, he noted that the parties had signed and broken many peace agreements in the past. In the light of that experience, the international community had reason to be skeptical about embracing the current Agreement before they had demonstrated their readiness to honour it.

Over the next three months, the Special Representative for Liberia would conduct an in-depth assessment of the role the United Nations military observers could play in support of the peace process, the Secretary-General continued. He would also make recommendations on any adjustments in UNOMIL's strength that might be required if the parties were willing to implement the Accra Agreement.

The Secretary-General stressed that all Liberians must ensure that the Agreement and the timetable laid out for its implementation were strictly adhered to. He warned the Liberian factions that without their full commitment to that process, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the international community could not continue to assist them in the search for peace.

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The Georgian/Abkhaz political process is at a standstill, despite a year of negotiations towards a comprehensive settlement, according to the Secretary-General. In a report to the Security Council dated 6 January, he said the core question of the conflict -- the identification of a political status for Abkhazia acceptable to both sides -- remained far from being resolved.

Given the intensity and proximity of the crisis in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation, it was likely that political efforts to address the Abkhazia issue would remain in suspense for the time being, he continued. However, he stressed that in the longer term, the issue could only be resolved through negotiations between the two sides. Meanwhile, the situation prevented a resolution of the humanitarian problems of refugees and displaced persons, and failed to provide the basic elements of stability and security.

(more)

The Secretary-General said that he remained willing to assist personally by meeting separately or jointly with the leaders of the two sides, and that his Special Envoy was also ready to continue his mediating role. He recommended that the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) be extended until 15 May, at which time the mandate of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peace-keeping force would end.

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Last year began and ended with 17 active United Nations peace-keeping operations around the world, a spokesman for the Organization said today. The total reached 18 in May and June, with the creation of the brief but successful Libya-Chad mission. The United Nations Observer Mission Uganda-Rwanda (UNOMUR) was phased out in September, but the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) was established in December.

The number of peace-keeping operations will fall over the next four months as the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (UNOMOZ), the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) and the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) are closed down, the spokesman continued. Troop strength remained at around 70,000 through 1994, while the number of troop-contributors rose from 70 to 76.

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Malaysia has withdrawn its battalion from the mission area of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II), leaving some 8,000 peace-keepers in the country, a spokesman for the Organization said today. He noted that a French frigate had taken up position off the Somali coast as the first part of a multinational force covering the final phases of UNOSOM II's withdrawal. Italy, Malaysia, Pakistan and the United States will also contribute naval units to the force.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP) has announced that it will supply an additional 80,000 metric tons of food to Somalia in 1995. The Programme noted that the country would face a wide range of problems this year, including the return and resettlement of some 400,000 refugees and 280,000 internally displaced persons, and the demobilization and reintegration of former militiamen.

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A United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mission has arrived in North Ossetia to begin assessing the Chechen refugee situation, a spokesman for the Organization said today. Meanwhile, two aircraft loaded with relief supplies are ready to fly to the area from the Netherlands and Turkey.

(more)

The spokesman noted that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will be dealing with an estimated 200,000 internally displaced persons in the Chechen Republic. The UNHCR will be responsible for some 100,000 to 125,000 refugees in two neighbouring republics.

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With final preparations for the World Summit for Social Development under way, the United Nations will host a seminar from 11 to 13 January to debate the challenges posed by global free market reforms. It will be attended by more than 150 scholars, United Nations and government officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations.

The seminar on economic restructuring and social policy will deal with some of the most contentious issues to be faced by the World Summit, which will be held in Copenhagen in March. The seminar is being organized by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and is co-sponsored by the European Centre for Social Welfare and Policy Research.

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Family planning can save children's lives and benefit the health of mothers, according to a new United Nations study. Entitled "The Health Rationale of Family Planning: Timing of Births and Child Survival", it was conducted by the Population Division of the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis.

The study found that child survival could be improved through delaying child-bearing at least to age 18 and possibly to age 20, and more especially through achieving birth intervals of at least two years. The study -- the most wide ranging to date on the topic -- encompassed over 280,000 births and nearly 35,000 deaths before age five in 25 countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

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The World Commission on Culture and Development will focus on the Arab region at a meeting in Muscat, Oman, from 10 to 12 January. Held under the auspices of the Omani Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, the meeting will bring together decision makers, scholars and experts to discuss culture and development and related regional concerns.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations jointly established the World Commission in 1992. Since then, it has been holding hearings throughout the world to prepare the World Report on Culture and Development. The policy-oriented report will contain recommendations designed to ensure that the cultural dimension is included in all economic and social development plans.

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